



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## WEST VIRGINIA TRANSGENDER STUDENT BULLIED, HARASSED BY PRINCIPAL IN SCHOOL BATHROOM

CLARKSBURG, W.Va. - The American Civil Liberties of West Virginia (ACLU-WV) sent a letter today to Dr. Mark A. Manchin, superintendent for Harrison County schools, regarding an abusive encounter in the boys bathroom directed at a transgender student by an assistant principal at Liberty High School in Clarksburg, W.Va.

In its letter, the ACLU-WV is demanding relief on behalf of sophomore Michael Critchfield, who was cornered, harassed and intimidated in a public boys bathroom by Assistant Principal Lee Livengood. Mr. Livengood confronted Michael in the restroom, consistently misgendering him and challenging him to use a urinal to prove that he was a boy. At the end of the exchange, Mr. Livengood told Michael in front of other students and a chaperone, "Not going to lie. You freak me out."

"At the end of the day, all I want is to feel welcome and safe in my school," says Michael Critchfield, sophomore student at Liberty High School. "Mr. Livengood's behavior in the bathroom that day was terrifying and no student deserves that kind of treatment. I'm telling my story so that high school doesn't have to be a scary place for kids like me."

The ACLU-WV is seeking the following relief:

- (1) Instituting best practice policies in the school system for dealing with trans students and trans issues;
- (2) Training for teachers and administrations on dealing with trans issues;
- (3) Resolution/discipline with regard to the assistant principal

"The fact that this not only occurred on school property, but was perpetrated by a principal at the school is reprehensible," says Joseph Cohen, ACLU-WV executive director. "We trust West Virginia schools to care for and educate our children and because of that, they must be held to a higher standard than what Michael experienced. This should never have happened in the first place and we are certainly doing everything we can to ensure it never happens again."

In 2011 the West Virginia State Board of Education implemented an anti-bullying policy that specifically enumerates protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, Harrison County Schools has a policy in place prohibiting harassment or bullying on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation. Attempts to make similar changes to the state code have not been successful.

“It’s not enough that we have a state board of education policy prohibiting bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity,” says Fairness West Virginia executive director Andrew Schneider. “The West Virginia Legislature must take it a step further to ensure the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ young people by codifying protections for our most vulnerable students.”

At the time the letter was sent, no known disciplinary actions had been taken against Mr. Livengood and he continues to serve in the same capacity at Liberty High School.

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